

# THE COMMUNICATOR



NCDHH FULL BOARD OF  
COMMISSIONERS

## VACANCIES

DEAF & HARD OF HEARING  
REPRESENTATIVE

The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) Full Board has an opening for a deaf and hard of hearing representative to serve. Our legislation requires the commission members shall include three deaf persons; three hard of hearing persons and three persons who have an interest in and knowledge of deafness and hearing loss issues.

The Commission conducts quarterly meetings, generally with the meeting occurring on a Friday. In addition, the Commission members may serve on a subcommittee, which generally meets during the board meeting or possibly an additional four times a year. Members will be reimbursed for their travel expenses.

Appointments are selected by the Nebraska Governor. Anyone interested in becoming a Full Commission Member needs to submit an application to the Governor's Board and Commission Office, attention Pat Selk, PO Box 94848, Lincoln, NE 68509-4848. Contact Ms. Selk at (402) 471-2256 (voice) or apply online at: <https://governor.nebraska.gov/board-comm-req>



# Director's Corner

## NEBRASKA DEAF HERITAGE MUSEUM & CULTURAL CENTER OPEN HOUSE



In April, Arlene attended the Nebraska Deaf Heritage Museum & Cultural Center Open House. This was a great opportunity to meet more community members, and take a tour to see more of the cultural center!



In the meantime, Arlene has hit the ground running to get to know stakeholder organizations and agencies, get involved in community groups such as dinners and meetings at Omaha Association of the Deaf, Nebraska Association of the Deaf, and attending agency events and presentations! The agency held it's first in-person staff and team building meeting under Arlene's leadership.

# RECOGNIZING DEAFBLIND AWARENESS WEEK

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The annual DeafBlind Awareness Week will be celebrated nationwide from June 25 – July 1, 2023. This event was first recognized in 1984 when then-President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the last week of June as “Helen Keller DeafBlind Awareness Week” in remembrance of Helen Keller, who was born on June 27, 1880 and lost her sight and hearing as a toddler due to an illness. As well as to raise awareness and recognize various achievements and capabilities of individuals who are DeafBlind.

Helen Keller would typically have quotes that many of us are aware of. The one I typically like to use is:

***“Blindness separates us from things, but deafness separates us from people.”***



This really boils down to a person’s attitude. It is important to consider how we approach, interact, and involve a person who is DeafBlind. And the era has changed since Helen Keller’s time. Individuals who are DeafBlind can live independently, hold a career, and participate in many community or social functions as access to communication, technologies, transportation, and various services has enormously expanded. Several Nebraska state agencies and organizations, including NCDHH, are hoping to obtain funds to establish a Support Service Provider pilot program in the near future.

Join me to learn more about the DeafBlind community, enhance our awareness, and improve our attitudes. Participate in their events and celebrate with them. Involve them in our society and community events. Here are some resources to get started:

## Feeling Through

An Oscars Academy Award nominated short film by Doug Roland involving a homeless teen and a DeafBlind man in New York.

## Join Helen Keller Services Celebrating DeafBlind Awareness Week

Helen Keller Services provide several educational and activity ideas to celebrate DeafBlind Awareness Week.

## The Learning Center

An online portal provided by the Helen Keller National Center for DeafBlind Youths and Adults that offers webinars, online course and resources regarding individuals who are DeafBlind.

## Helen Keller National Center Great Plains Regional Office

One of HKNC’s regional offices that covers Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri and Kansas. Subscribe to their newsletter or seek to obtain consultation, advocacy, assessment, training, and additional resources related to DeafBlind.

# "KEEP YOUR FACE TO THE SUNSHINE AND YOU CANNOT SEE A SHADOW"

Sharon Price, Behavioral Health Coordinator  
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Helen Keller famously quoted, "Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see a shadow. It's what the sunflowers do." Maybe you have observed a field of sunflowers that are always facing towards the sun throughout the day. Just like humans, they benefit from sunshine. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the biggest benefit of sunlight is its ability to boost our body's supply of Vitamin D, which strengthens our bones and immune system. Some may use what is called a light therapy box that mimics sunlight during the colder winter months which helps to reduce seasonal affective depression.



How does sunshine help lift depression and improve moods? Sunshine boosts your body's serotonin levels. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) explains that serotonin is a neurotransmitter that carries messages between nerve cells in your brain throughout your body. Not only does it help with moods and sleep, it also increases satisfaction, happiness, optimism, and improves sexual desires. Sun exposure can help with anxiety and depression usually when it is combined with other treatments such as counseling and/or medication.

According to the World Population Review, Nebraska is within the top half of the states in the country to have the most sunshine year-round. Sunshine regulates your circadian rhythm which impacts your melatonin levels. Increased levels of melatonin help you sleep, therefore, when you get up in the morning and face the sunshine, the melatonin levels decrease. This helps you to wake up, be more active and improve moods. Although you may have heard that too much sun exposure can lead to various types of skin-health conditions and cancers depending on your skin type, a few sources including the WHO state that a moderate amount of sunlight has preventive benefits when it comes to skin health conditions and cancers. Too little sunlight can cause some types of cancers as well. Sunburns are more common from the direct rays of the sun obtained between the hours of 10 am to 4 pm. Don't forget to use sunscreen and cover well.



Back to Helen Keller's quote. What is the significance of the meaning of the sunshine, the shadow, and the sunflower? Hellen Keller, a deafblind woman, never allowed her challenges to interfere with her life despite having communication barriers and obstacles. She continued to maintain hope and strived for it. Maybe you are going through stressors in our lives, facing challenges we feel we cannot overcome or need support to get us to where we need to be. We need to remind ourselves we can choose to be optimistic despite what may be going on in our lives. We need to keep our face to the sun, embrace the source of positivity and possibility. If we choose to look towards the light at the end of the tunnel, we will not see the shadows behind us.

The shadows can represent what may be going wrong in our lives or indicate ignorance on our part. This is not to say the shadows are not important. We may be triggered by incidents and events either from our past or present lives, but we all can use and learn healthy coping skills to overcome our shadows. We should continue to strive to be like the big, tall, and mighty sunflower, always looking towards the bright, warm light to maintain its strength, its positive energy. Do you feel you are struggling to overcome and ignore your shadows? NCDHH has information and resources that may help. Please contact me at (402) 682-7129 or text (402) 613-3869 or e-mail at sharon.price@nebraska.gov.

# SUPPORT FOR VETERANS

*Susan Whitaker, Education Advocate / Advocacy Specialist*  
*Scottsbluff*  
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A booth I do every year is at our Veteran's Stand Down event at the Western Nebraska Community College. This event is sponsored by the Veterans Upward Bound program. Every veteran I met at this event suffers from tinnitus and most also suffer from hearing loss. The exposure a veteran has to extreme noise is inevitable. From the tanks, ships, aircraft and weapons a veteran will experience hearing loss, even when they were what protection they are given. When they come home from service many of them are looking to begin a new life and education can be part of that.

The Veteran's Upward Bound program is "designed to motivate and assist veterans in the development of academic and other requisite skills necessary for acceptance and success in a program of postsecondary education. The program provides assessment and enhancement of basic skills through counseling, mentoring, tutoring and academic instruction in the core subject areas.



**Veterans Upward Bound**

The primary goal of the program is to increase the rate at which participants enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs." (Veterans Upward Bound Program, 2023) Projects also help veterans in securing support services from other locally available resources like the Veterans Administration, veteran associations and others. The Veterans Upward Bound program provides services including counseling services designed to improve the financial and economic literacy of the veteran, personal counseling, mentor programs and overall support to become successful in their postsecondary education.

If you are a veteran in pursuit of a college education in Nebraska, check the following colleges for Veteran Upward Bound programs:

Metropolitan Community College in Omaha  
Western Nebraska Community College in Scottsbluff

The Hearing Loss Association of America has a virtual chapter for veterans with hearing loss. The Veteran Across America Virtual Chapter has monthly meeting, complete with captions via Zoom. This group meets every 3rd Tuesday of the month. "The mission of the HLAA Veterans Across America Virtual Chapter is to provide education, be an advocate for veterans with hearing loss, and to provide a support system to help them to return and adjust to civilian life." (HLAA Veterans Across America Virtual Chapter (VAAVC), n.d.)

When a veteran retires from service and has to readjust to life outside of the military it can be tough. Especially when they are trying to deal with tinnitus and hearing loss. There are other organizations to help make these adjustments. If you are a veteran who needs some extra support please check into these organizations. They are here to help you make a successful reentry back into society.

Thank you to all our veterans! You sacrifice your body, mind, soul and hearing to keep us safe and free. Now it's our turn to help you. Don't ever be ashamed to ask for the help you need. Serving in the military can take its toll on your life. Reach out if you are feeling overwhelmed and need that extra support. Our Advocacy Specialist are here to help you with your hearing loss. Allow us to show you how to live a better life with hearing loss.

Other organizations for assistance:

Veterans Crisis Line – 1-800-273-8255 Press 1

Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs - <https://veterans.nebraska.gov/>

Omaha Vet Center - <https://www.va.gov/omaha-vet-center/>

## NEW ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, GINA PETERSEN

*Gina Peterson, Staff Assistant*

*Omaha*

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June 5th marked Gina's first month. During her time here so far, Gina has learned exactly what staff assistants do, which is (you guessed it) assist! So far, she has learned several different ways to help out NCDHH staff members and clients by taking phone calls, editing projects, generating monthly reports and much more. However, she knows that learning never truly stops and aims to become a wellspring of knowledge like her NCDHH teammates. As a proud CODA, Gina is also working on her ASL fluency skills to streamline conversation both in the workplace and the community and is looking forward to participating in community events and outreach in the future.



# THINGS TO CHECK OFF YOUR SUMMER TO-DO LIST

*Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator  
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Welcome to the start of summer! Now, slow down. You don't want to miss anything by hurrying past it. That's the wisdom of summer. It teaches us to be fully awake, engaged, and open to everything around us. It's the season for relaxing and the pursuit of happiness (a phrase immortalized one summer nearly 250 Fourth of Julys ago).

In the United States, summer is bookended by two holidays that honor work and sacrifice. Memorial Day reminds us to look back with gratitude and honor soldiers who died in battle. And Labor Day (celebrated in May in most other countries) honors work by giving many of us a break from it. The latter holiday was signed into law in the summer (of 1894). It's a metaphor. Between sacrifice and work – and maybe because of it – we have freedom. Summer is the season of self-autonomy.

## **This summer, there are several things to check off your summer to-do list:**

1. All Interpreter/Transliterators and Intermediary (Deaf Interpreter) licenses expire on June 30, 2023. License renewal applications received after June 30th, incur an additional late fee penalty of \$25 and 30 days past the expiration date, the license is revoked, and a \$75 reinstatement fee applies.
2. If travel is something you'd like to do this summer, the 2023 Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) national conference will be held in Baltimore, Maryland from July 26th to July 30th. Connect with fellow interpreters and experience the fun and excitement of Baltimore! Renew your passion for the profession AND earn some CEUs.
3. Maybe you'd like to take advantage of some local continuing education opportunities? Don't forget about the "Immersion Training for Deaf and Hearing Interpreter Teams" presented by Dr. Regan Thibodeau. You can earn a whopping 1.8 CEUs during this weekend workshop, which is happening on June 23rd, 24th and 25th in LaVista. Registration deadline is June 16th or when the maximum capacity of 30 participants is reached. Feel free to contact me if you are interested in registering at [Sharon.sinkler@nebraska.gov](mailto:Sharon.sinkler@nebraska.gov).
4. Don't forget about the Nebraska Association of the Deaf's (NeAD) 52nd biennial conference which will take place at the Saunders County Fairgrounds in Wahoo, Nebraska on August 15th and 26th. This is a great opportunity to mix and mingle, as well as support the state chapter of the NAD. The early bird registration deadline is August 1st. Please contact the conference chairperson, Candice Arteaga with any questions at [cha13@cloud.com](mailto:cha13@cloud.com).
5. And of course, make sure you follow us on Facebook to find out about all the great events planned over the summer months.

Whatever you do during summer's few months, it is the season when many memories are forged. So, dig in and make some new memories, even if your plans also include taking naps, reading outside, sleeping in a tent, or floating in a pool (my favorite thing to do!). Many of summer's greatest pleasures are simple and inexpensive. (*David G. Allan, 2021*)

# KEARNEY SPOTLIGHT

Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist

Kearney

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My spotlight on the community this month focused on Jim Sharrick of Hastings Nebraska.

## Tell a little about yourself.

My name is Jim Sharrick, officially now a senior citizen, and hard of hearing since my early twenties. My hearing loss is caused by otosclerosis, which mimics hearing loss symptoms typically associated with noise induced hearing loss, but progresses much faster. It can be treated with surgery, which is normally 90+% effective, and it worked great for the four to six weeks that the prosthesis stayed in place in my case. I gave it a shot another four times, same results, and wound up with a more powerful hearing aid each time. I currently sport an implant on the left ear, and am aided on the right ear. Although physiologically I am deaf, I am not culturally Deaf, so I don't know sign language.

My speech is unaffected by the condition, so you probably wouldn't know it if you spoke with me. These experiences have given me pretty good insight to both being HOH, and interacting with the HOH. I am able to spot individuals that need hearing aids (there's a lot of body language that goes on) and don't know it, or know it and won't do anything to remedy it. The typical solution is to turn up the TV or sound system volume and blast their poor cochleas with still more sound waves the nerve won't withstand. Many of these individuals have the resources to buy hearing aids, but insist they can (put uninformed reason here) do without. Alas, my nagging/educating efforts have only been successful twice that I know.

## What is some of the work you do for the hearing loss community?

I am a member of Sertoma, a national service club with the mission of assisting those with hearing loss. I'm on the board of the Nebraska Sertoma Hearing Aid Bank, and a past board member & current committee member of the Hearing Charities of America. Both Sertoma & HCOA run the Hearing Aid Project, a national program which assists with providing low cost hearing aids to those with need. I'm a member of the Hastings Noon Sertoma Club, which hosts the Sertoma 8-Man Allstar Football Game each June, with proceeds going to the Sertoma Hearing Aid Bank. (Shout out to the fine folk at the NCDHH who process the hearing aid applications!) Locally, the Hastings club has partnered with ESU 9 for various projects, and help provide FM assistive listening systems for the Hastings Deaf/HOH school programs.

## How has hearing loss has affected you?

I'm pretty well adjusted to my hearing loss, and know all the limitations. Restaurants, once considered places for fine dining because the food was good (and expensive) were a quiet place to hold private conversations. Now, they still serve good food (also expensive), but are no place to hold a conversation. Every bit of cloth that once absorbed sound waves has been removed, both for the look and to reduce cleaning costs, and there is no place to avoid the music speakers. One sweet advantage that I do have is I can reduce the volume in the movie theaters during the action scenes, but heaven help me if a British accent is being used. I know I'll have to see the show again to translate parts of the dialog.

## What is a underrecognized thing that people don't realize about hearing loss, or having it?

Accents. This brings me to an underrecognized aspect to hearing loss, which is the brain's process of translating speech. Both the HOH & those who interact with them don't always realize that distinction and input speed, not volume, are more important to understanding speech. The brain takes longer to translate a distorted signal, which if you're HOH, that's what you're going to get. It's like downloading a complex webpage on your computer. Your brain must first figure out what was said, and then compose the response. Those who have typical hearing are usually composing their response as they listen. Human beings aren't very patient with response delays, and just a puny second's delay, or even less, throws us off. Realize, if you are HOH, it's just going to take longer to respond, and you need to make certain those around you know that. Anyone that speaks to me from another room other than to call my name is wasting effort. Limitations are real, and you have to have processes in place. In my home, whoever starts the conversation physically goes to the one they're addressing. Advocate for yourself, let people know what does & doesn't work for you, and stick with it.

# DEAFVERSE: CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

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There is a free online game called 'Deafverse' for the deaf and hard of hearing youth that focuses on developing their self-advocacy skills in different settings in the world. There is a team of deaf graphic designers, cartoonist, narrator, actors, and more that worked together to develop this game. Deafverse worked with the National Deaf Center to empower the deaf and hard of hearing to be able to succeed.

Deafverse provides scenarios with choices through the game and later the option to explain how it was the right choice and explain why. The game includes explanation why it is the deaf and hard of hearing's right to have effective communication in a school setting. I had the opportunity to play it for a brief time and enjoyed it. The game is very accessible, it has American Sign Language, transcript, and spoken English. The scenarios are realistic, making it a very easy game to play. This is a great guideline to assist youth to understand what their rights are and how they can approach effective communication.

If your teenager is interested in gaining their confidence in self-advocacy or would like to learn more about empowering their self-advocacy, this is a good place to start. You may find more information on the game here: Often the deaf and hard of hearing communities struggles to find public places that already provides hearing loops. **GOOD NEWS!!!** Hearing Loss American Association (HLAA) was able to work with Google to develop an accessibility feature on their Google Map. Basically, when you are searching for a place to see if they provide hearing loop system, Google Map will state if there is hearing loop accessibility. For example, you wanted to find the address for Benson Theatre and wanted to see if they have hearing loop, in Google Maps, they will have an accessibility tab and that will inform you if they offer hearing loops or not.

This is still a work in progress and HLAA will need your help on this by promoting and advocating for Hearing Loop Systems. If you noticed the google map isn't showing hearing loop system in accessibility, they encourage you to fill out the form and inform them. I've included these below. .

If you have questions or would like more information on how NCDHH services can help, please contact me at [ashley.wulf@nebraska.gov](mailto:ashley.wulf@nebraska.gov).

# LIVE CAPTIONS ON IPHONE - MY EXPERIENCE

*Jeremy Daffern, Advocacy Specialist*

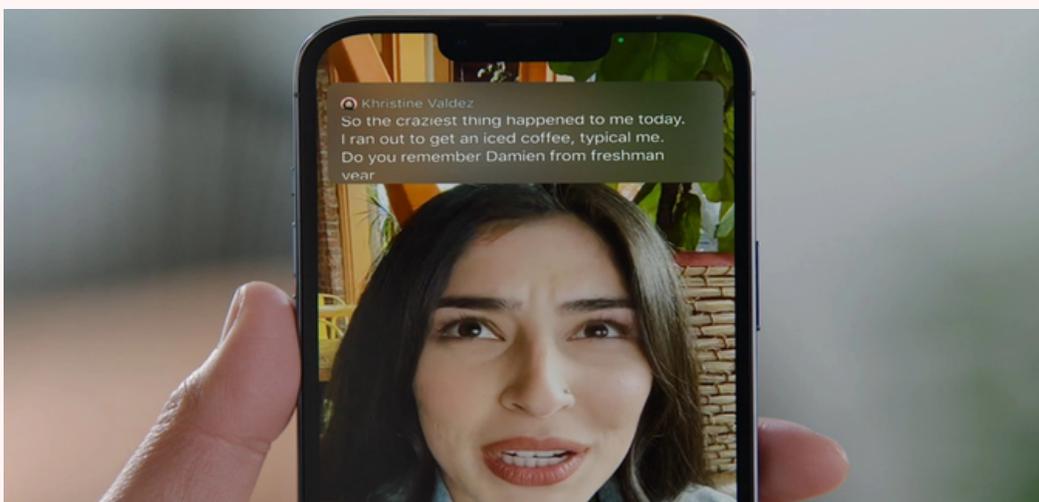
*Omaha*

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While I was browsing Facebook one day, I noticed a post about live captions on Facetime and how it works. Live captions are beneficial and help communicate with your family or friends. It caught my attention because I have some hearing family and I want to talk with them directly.

I went to my iPhone Settings and found live captions and turned it on. I called my friend on Facetime. As she talked, the captions showed up above our faces (see the example image below). Siri was listening to her voice and typed the words out. I noticed some words were garbled and not verbatim.



It was an interesting experience while I was using it and I want to give Apple the recognition they deserve to bridge the communication gap. If you want to try it out yourself, here are the directions: Go to Settings > Accessibility > Live Captions (Beta) > click on tab on Live Captions in Facetime, then go to home screen and you make a Facetime call, the captions will show up on the top.

If you have any questions or would like to know more, please contact me at [Jeremy.daffern@nebraska.gov](mailto:Jeremy.daffern@nebraska.gov).

# COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES DURING EMERGENCIES

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Whether you are Deaf-Blind, deaf, or hard of hearing, communicating during emergencies is deeply challenging. For anyone, any stressful situations during emergencies contribute to make it hard to speak, hear, or think clearly. For people who have differing levels of hearing, there's extra layers of complexity and additional obstacles that make navigating during emergencies even more difficult. Some challenges during emergencies for people who are deaf or hard of hearing include:

**Difficulty hearing emergency alerts:** For hearing people, the scream of a siren is loud, often uncomfortably so, prompting people to cover their ears. That's not necessarily the case for anyone with hearing loss. Depending on someone's severity of hearing loss they may not hear emergency alerts or alarms, such as fire alarms, smoke detectors at all, and emergency vehicle sirens also can be difficult or impossible to hear.

**More likely to miss subtle cues that signal danger:** It's not just sirens that announce danger. External sounds provide a sense of environmental awareness. Persons with lowered levels of hearing are less likely to pick up any subtle cues of approaching danger such as a home intruder, water leak, or elevator malfunction. With lowered levels or no hearing, a person may walk toward a dangerous situation unknowingly, having no directional information on the source of a particular sound.

**Hearing and talking to first responders.** Another challenge can be hearing instructions from first responders, or taking in the questions they're asking

**Preparation is key!** By nature, emergencies are unexpected. People don't intend to have car accidents or medical crises or to encounter natural disasters. But, you can prepare for how you'll handle unexpected situations. Have a plan on where to go and what steps to follow during an emergency. Consider having a go-bag in place, a meeting spot pre-arranged, and all the other recommended steps for emergency prep. It may be helpful to discuss emergency plans with a friendly neighbor and request that they check in on you in case they hear your alarm.

Here are other safety-related tactics to implement:

- Update alarms and other safety devices, utilize signalers that vibrate or have flashing lights. Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide meters that emit beeps when they detect danger aren't necessarily helpful for people with hearing loss. Make sure you can perceive your home alarms. You decide whether that means getting something with extra amplification, or changing the pitch of the alarm to make it easier to pick up. Alerting devices, including smoke alarms for people with hearing loss, are available that use lower frequency sounds, emit a visual cue, or incorporate vibrotactile elements. These types of signalers may prove helpful since most people don't wear their hearing aids to sleep.
- Just the act of wearing hearing aids, if you have them, is helpful. Doing so helps you hear signs of danger and ups your ability to communicate. Make sure your hearing devices are charged or have fresh batteries and are well maintained. Consider charging them near your bed for easy access in a middle-of-the-night emergency. Keep spare batteries in various places for emergencies, like in your car or a purse. For rechargeable hearing aids, consider getting a portable power bank, which can be stored in your go-bag (or car) for easy access.
- When possible, sign up for emergency alerts via texts, rather than phone alerts, so emergency messages are abundantly clear.
- Consider a medical bracelet quickly convey your condition to first responders. This functional jewelry can alert people, including first responders or emergency room staff, to your name and hearing loss. For anyone with an invisible disability, like hearing loss or an allergy to medication, a medical ID bracelet (or necklace) offers valuable information. You can include details on the medications you take, the specifics of your hearing loss (for instance, if you wear cochlear implants or use hearing aids), and other important health information.

- Keep communication support in your go bag. If you have an emergency bag, include a power source for your hearing aids inside it, along with pen and paper to aid communication. If you sign, bring flashlights and batteries so that hands can be visible. Flashlights can also be helpful if you speech/lipread.
- Other good go bag items include waterproof containers for hearing aids or cochlear implants, batteries & accessories, as well as pre-printed communication cards.

During any emergency situation, you'll need to be extra vigilant so you can use alternate cues from your other senses. Do not hesitate to rely on others to help you, along with first responders, neighbors, friends, and loved ones can lend a hand and help with communication. Don't be afraid to rely on people around you to be your extra set of ears.

Look for visual information: Often emergencies are signaled with sound and lights, like a siren with flashing lights. While auditory signals may not be so helpful, take advantage of what you can see, including flashing lights, written instructions, and so on.

Let people know...Hearing loss is an invisible disability, which means that those around you may not realize that you need accommodation or extra assistance. If you tell people, they'll be aware, and communications will be far smoother. This information can be particularly important when you're interacting with the police. You do not want to be mistaken for being disobedient or belligerent. Calmly identify that you have a hearing loss and show them that you wear hearing aids, or share other details on your hearing loss.

If you're interacting with an EMT, fireperson, police officer, or other first responder, aim to speak slowly, calmly, and clearly. Make sure they can see your face and use gestures if needed. If you're not sure if you were heard correctly, repeat or rephrase statements, and ask questions to confirm you were fully understood. You can always opt to use pencil and paper (or the notes app in your phone) to communicate.

Finally, don't forget the other tools you might have: Utilize voice to text apps on your phone, open up a blank email in your phone or tablet, and ask the speaker to type answers, or, use a pen and paper to aid communication. When possible, follow best practices for communicating with people with hearing loss, including ensuring good lighting, minimizing background noise, and making it easy for them to view your face.

If you would like to discuss my article, anything hearing related or NCDHH's programs and services, please contact me at my North Platte office phone number (308) 535-6600 or you can email me at [kathy.scusa@nebraska.gov](mailto:kathy.scusa@nebraska.gov). I look forward to serving you.

<https://www.healthyhearing.com/report/53452-Emergency-communication-hearing-loss-deaf-tips>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/dbhis/are-you-ready-emergency-preparedness-people-hearing-loss>

<https://doh.wa.gov/emergencies/be-prepared-be-safe/emergency-information-specific-groups/deaf-and-hardhearing-disaster-tips>

<https://www.nad.org/resources/emergency-preparedness/>

<https://www.weather.gov/wrn/dhh-safety>